

## Time's Social Metaphors

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# **Time's Social Metaphors**

## **An empirical research**

**Ramón Ramos Torre**

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**ABSTRACT.** The article addresses the analysis of time images furnished by a qualitative research made in Spain on the relations of working time and family/personal time. The analysis focuses on three widespread time metaphors used in day-to-day speeches by social agents. The first one is the metaphor of time as resource for action. Its value is equally economical, moral and political. Used in different context of action, it may mean something that can be either invested, donated generously to others, appropriated for caring for oneself, or spent without purpose with others. The second metaphor represents time as an external environment to which action must adapt. This metaphor shows many variants that represent time as a dynamic/static, repetitive/innovative, ordered/chaotic environment. In this external environment, the agents must resolve the problems of temporal embeddedness, hierarchy and synchronization of their actions. The third metaphor shows time as a horizon of action intentionality where the agents try to construct the meaning of their action and identity. Within this horizon the construction of a significant narrative connecting past and present experiences with future expectations is possible. **KEY WORDS** • plurality of time • social metaphors • time metaphors • time narratives

Since Durkheim's days, it has been repeated that time is one of social phenomena's relevant determining factors. Over the last few decades, this notion has ceased to be a ritual statement, rarely accompanied by consequent practice. Instead, it has become the obvious, and is presupposed in any solid research. A

sociology of time has thus been constituted, or one could say that sociological analysis has gradually been temporalized.<sup>1</sup> In short, there is increasing consensus that, far from being trivial or merely a parameter in which to measure or place things without becoming a part of them, time is central to sociological analysis. As Barbara Adam (1990, 1995) has stressed again and again, time counts, it *matters*, and it therefore must be taken into account.

Three decades ago, Niklas Luhmann (1976) drew attention to time theory's shortfall or backwardness in sociology, and the need for it to be developed. This theoretical shortfall persists. And, indeed, despite the proliferation of research, articles and books informing about the greatest variety of aspects of what is usually called social time, it is still hard to know what exactly one is speaking of when making reference to that time. And it is even more problematic to ascertain how its many manifestations, normally differentiated by subjects or activity (i.e. young people's time, women's time, working time, leisure time, technological time), are cases or variants of time in general, and in what precise sense they actually vary or can be differentiated. Are they truly different? Is it really all the same time but just incarnated in specific subjects or activities? Is something non-trivial being said when one speaks of social times? What times are being spoken of? What are the differential determining factors that legitimate its being distinguished from the rest?

The questions pile up and the answers do not seem easy. Yet this is a broad field of research, often oscillating between two futile extremes. In some cases the tendency is to state the obvious through a misleading use of the wrapping of time. In others, the tendency, contrarily, is to say things that sound profound, but that are actually so obscure and personal that little light is actually shed, thereby fuelling the feeling, old as mysticism itself, that time is of the order of the ineffable. Best say nothing.

Time in sociological research is often caught in this bind, between triviality and obscurity. Obviously this is not always the case. Noteworthy efforts in theory have been made in works as varied as those by Luhmann (1976, 1982, 1987), Giddens (1984), Adam (1990, 1995) and Nowotny (1989).<sup>2</sup> All in all, the task has only just begun. In order to break away from the swinging back and forth from triviality to obscurity and vice versa, the effort must be carried forward; that is to say, points of view with substantive theory must be accumulated to develop a truly reflective sociology of time. What follows aims to contribute to this collective task.

### **On Time's Social Metaphors**

What I postulate is that in the framework of this reflexive social science, the clarification of time must always take into account what the social agents say or

assume about time: their lexicon, their 'grammar', their images, and even their ambivalences and inconsistencies. This is where the starting point should be. If we do not consider what gives meaning to time in everyday life and language, we will not be able to make much progress at all in exploring the issue in the social sciences. How can this be done? By paying close attention to what the social actors say, what they convey, what they do and do not agree upon. In order to ascertain this, in this article I will make use of information provided by 14 discussion groups,<sup>3</sup> carried out in a study on work-life balance.<sup>4</sup> This is where we can find elements that are central to the social discourses on time and therefore to time itself.

When analysing this material, my attention is selective. I do not purport to study how actors conceive relationships between work and daily life, or the strategies to make them compatible, or the resulting problems or differences based on gender, education, work, employment, social class, income and so forth. My research topic, which is not work or everyday life in and of itself, but rather how work and everyday life time is conceived, precedes these issues. Specifically, my interest lies in the temporal language that actors use to communicate with each other and attempt to manifest their work-life balance problems. Only after reconstructing this temporal language can one address the other issues. Only then can one move on to study work, everyday life, the times that belong to them, and their complex balance. Consequently, my focus when analysing the 14 discussion groups is temporal language, and, going back to something that Lakoff and Johnson (1980) outlined in their fundamental book on the metaphors of everyday life, I aim to explore some of the metaphors of time as they appear in social language and communication. But first, I will make a series of clarifications regarding the meaning and the scope of this hypothesis.

First: although for most people the metaphor is limited to a manifestation of poetic imagination, thereby reducing its meaning, it actually goes beyond these limits (Blumenberg, 1997). As Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 39) maintain, 'our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we think and act, is fundamentally of a metaphoric nature'.

Second: the metaphoric appropriation of time is not a limitation characteristic of laymen's language that, due to a lack of analytical capacity, seeks refuge in the 'as if', that is, in the analogy or similarity of time and other experiences in the world. Actually, as is well known, even the most abstract notions are nothing more than half-latent metaphors. Therefore, the key to understanding the most complex philosophies of time is provided by their constitutive metaphors.<sup>5</sup> To put this graphically, a supermarket cashier is obviously not Saint Augustine, but can use very similar metaphors to account for her experiences and anguishes regarding time.

Third: metaphors are language tropes that establish a relationship of similarity between two semantic fields, but not their identity. Hence, implicitly or explic-

itly, any metaphor sets out boundaries of similarity and ends up also manifesting this difference separating the terms it connects. In time's social discourses, the metaphors used also indicate the boundaries beyond which these discourses cease to be operative and plausible. Obviously, beyond these boundaries the metaphoric relationship ceases to 'work'.

Fourth: not all social time that is pertinent for the agents is explicitly linguistic; neither is all temporal language metaphorical. In other words, not all social time is language, and not all temporal language is a metaphor. It is obvious that many temporal aspects of social experience are not expressed in the form of explicit language, and yet despite this they are still relevant temporal aspects. Not all language of time is metaphoric. Metaphors are just one of the tropes in language, along with many other relevant aspects such as metonyms, synecdoche and, particularly, irony. This is particularly significant. A proper analysis of time's social discourses should unearth their punctuating ironies, that is, those figures of speech in which there is literally a turnaround revealing the negation of what is being affirmed. Obviously, there are many ironic plays on words, and a good approach to the social and linguistic construction of time should be sensitive to them. This will not be done here, because our focus is different.<sup>6</sup>

Fifth and last: while it is true that metaphors of time are ways of speaking, conceptualizing and experiencing, it is no less true that these ways are also (or end up being) ways of acting or doing. I therefore assume that the way in which the agents conceive of and speak of the world is also a way of shaping it. When the agents define their world in terms of temporal resources for action, or when they set them against a dynamic, constrictive time environment, or lastly, when they place them in a horizon in which a significant past is contemplated, they are not merely limiting themselves to contemplating and experiencing the world in this way, but also to acting accordingly. This gives rise to practices that translate what is said into what is done.

Having ended the clarifications, my scope will now be to explore three of these metaphors. Although they are not the only ones, they are at least among the most basic because they constitute the bulk of the repertoire of images and language games that make it possible to designate time and what is temporal. They are also basic because, as we will be able to observe, they establish a very basic matrix with which to generate rich, qualified variations.

### **Time as a Resource used by an Agent**

In this first metaphor, time presents itself as a *resource*. In order for time to be a resource it must be considered something one has in order to act. What is implicit in this stereotype is not simple. Three ideas are woven together: that action requires time; that one must have the time that is needed; and, that in

order to have it, it must be available. If we took the converse line of reasoning: if *there is* time, then it can be *had* and, as a result, one can *do* this or that by using or employing time. This is what is assumed in such a stereotypical statement as the following, in which a female administrative assistant verbalizes her feeling of being hurried in a labyrinth of time:

As soon as I step in the door, I'm running *against the clock*: the dentist's, the gym, the chemist's, the fish, the meat, the milk, the I-don't-know-what, the iron, the washing machine. I'm running against the clock; and family life, well, we all live together, but actual family life, what you think of as a really nice thing, *there is just no time*, there's not time, but we as wives don't have time, nor do our husbands, *no one has time*. (Gd4: female, administrative assistant)

Living against the clock is as much as saying living in a specific allocation of time for each specific course of action. In order for it to be possible, there has to be time for things that one wants to do and for this availability to translate into action. Time must be had. One must have it. Only then can it be 'used', 'employed' or 'administered'. If this were not the case, then that time, which is not there and cannot be felt, could be 'removed' from other niches of action; it could be 'stolen' and moved from one niche to another. But it could also be used as something to 'give', to 'give as a gift', to 'lend', to 'share', and so forth. This allows time that is owned to be transferred to someone else or received from someone else who has it.

### **Time as a resource for action**

From the standpoint of social science, what is most relevant about this metaphor is that time is presented and conceived as a 'resource for action'. Time is nothing without action and, if we heed Arendt's (1958) crucial distinction between the agent side and the patient side of action,<sup>7</sup> then time-resource assumes there is an actor-agent. There is an agent that has something, disposes of it, and acts after deliberating and deciding. This does not mean that, in terms of time, the actor is merely or always an agent, but rather that he or she can be an agent since time is a resource that, under certain conditions, can be disposed of. Later, we will be able to see that the time assumed in social discourses can also be experienced antithetically, that is to say not as something available for an agent, but as something imposed, constrictive and suffered from.

On the one hand, this resource available for action is usually considered *scarce*. This trait, which is so deeply rooted in everyday language and pervades most language games regarding time-resource, has often led the constitutive metaphor to be boiled down of to one of its variants, commodification. The recurring argument is that time-resource is a time-commodity, or more specifically time-money.<sup>8</sup> This would tie it to capitalism and its underlying theology,

which is to say, to economic discourse reducing everything to scarce, measurable, calculable commodities, subject to (ir)rational decision-making.<sup>9</sup>

Actually, things are more complicated. The shortage of time-resource is a widespread experience, but although it is diversified it certainly cannot be made universal. An examination of the experiences inscribed in the following statements suffices to observe this:

1. *'There aren't enough hours in a day, I think – Yeah, there aren't enough hours – The day would have to have 30 hours to cover everything'*. (Gd9: male and female, young temporary employees)
2. *'Women are assumed to have less time, because they have children, than men . . . Women have to co-ordinate the household, the children and work and men just have their work'*. (Gd3: female, manager in finance)
3. *'Before you would feel like doing something and had no time, but now you have time, but you don't feel like doing those things you used to do before with a lot of emphasis'*. (Gd6: male, unemployed)

Obviously, the experience of a lack of time, though it is very widespread, is also highly varied, and its meaning is even turned upside down when it crosses a boundary, which in this case is unemployment. The young people from the first fragment of the dialogue find themselves with a lack of time to perform their festive rituals, that is, 'party-party-party' (Gd9: young temporary employees) and would like a longer day, stretched out to 30 hours. They experience the anxiety generated by a universal lack of time. Contrarily, the woman in the second text portrays a life experience where the shortage of time is revealed as a product of gender inequality. Instead of constituting a universal, identical experience, it is something that especially affects certain people, while others do not suffer from it, or at least not to the same degree. Lastly, the third text enunciates the paradox of the shortage of time of the unemployed. Time lacked when they worked is over-abundant now that they are unemployed and, to use an expression (popularized by a Spanish movie) that the unemployed used themselves in the discussion groups, one spends one's Mondays (and every other day of the week) in the sun.<sup>10</sup>

This time-resource, punctuated by variable shortages but always open to deliberation and calculation, is conceived in at least three certainly intertwining ways, and analytical distinctions should be made between them. In certain cases, time is commodified and its metaphor is money. In others, time is moralized and its experience and strategies take on the language of duty, blame, or a heavy conscience. And finally, in others, time is a resource subject to the logic of power where independence is at stake and where fear is present and the yoke of coercion is felt. 'Commodification', 'moralization' and 'politicization' of time are the translations of these three still very general ways of experiencing and speaking of time.

According to Benjamin Franklin's stereotype, time is identified with, and certainly compared to, money. This is the expression of its *commodification*. This identification (passing easily from time to money and back) is clear in a discussion group with young adults:

The bad thing about living by yourself is that you have to cook your own food and everything. Everything – *You have to administer your time by yourself*, that's it, to do a whole lot of things – *Administer your time and your money too*. (Gd9: females, young, temporary employees)

This easy slipping back and forth from time to money and back to time does not dominate. The trend, which sometimes comes out very clear-cut, is rather to set the two against each other:

I'm the kind of person that would rather work my *hours* and have my *salary* and *live more* than to be working *overtime* and *living less*. (Gd9: female, young temporary employee)

In this pairing off as opposites, time and money are identified with each other, but within the continuum of tension that is confronted by an ensemble made up of time and life. Hence, instead of less time for living but more money, the preference is for less money but more time for living (without going into whatever that expression may mean).

Yet this twinning of opposites also announces that time is also calibrated as a value, and economic value is not the only one. Aside from the sheerly aesthetic value (of a beautiful life, emotional expressiveness), what appears most recurrently is the assertion of time's moral nature or meaning, its *moralization*, that is, its submission to the rationale of morality: duty and good. This means that when administering time, one recurrently heeds moral arguments. This, at least, is what the agents indicate in their verbalizations, as we can see in stereotypical discursive interventions such as the following:

1. 'All of us women who work and have children *feel enormous guilt*, because we want to be everywhere but we can't *cover everything*'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
2. 'Or the little daughter says to you: *Where are you leaving me today?*'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
3. 'And the working hours end at half past six and you say, well, I'll leave at half past six, but you say it with a *guilt complex*. God. I'm going to ruin the company . . . You feel *guilty* for having had a child, for living'. (Gd14: male, professional)

In all of these statements, administering or employing time devoted to the family and particularly to one's children is densely moralized. What is done and what is not, the time that, as we will see later on, is donated, is subject to strict



moral judgement indicating that what is at stake is the notion of what is good (a good life) and the notion of duty (what one must do with or for others). Considering that time that is experienced as a resource for action can only be a commodity subject to calculation and evaluated by using material, utilitarian criteria would therefore be too limited. One's moral self-esteem is also at stake in what one does with one's time-resource. Time is also a moral resource.

But it is also a political resource. What is done with it once it is had conforms to the rationale of power, the play on self-determination and its negation, hence what I call time's *politicization*. On the border are those life situations in which one does what one does because one cannot choose, where time is no longer a resource that is had, but rather servitude one is subjected to. This occurs at work:

There are a lot of people who can't *choose* and have to go [to work] at night.  
(Gd10: male, industrial worker)

But before that boundary, and even lying in a zone where fear and coercion come into play, time is calibrated by power. The theme recurs in the discussions on women's situation in society where what one agent calls 'the yokes' to which males subject her (Gd13: female, low-wage employee) persist. In these cases, language, when one speaks of domestic family time, becomes political, and dramatically so. What is detected and denounced is slavery:

What we women say, that we've been liberated when we're working, what a total and utter illusion, because we lead a *slave's* life, because men, as much as they say so, don't help . . . So what are you? A *slave*, because you spend your Saturdays and Sundays ironing, cleaning, washing. (Gd4: female, administrative assistant)

In any case, and even when referring to activities as heterogeneous as salaried work, the time put in is evaluated according to its denotation of power. For certain women, very explicitly, the opportunity to employ their time in work outside the home (regardless of the economic restrictions involved) has a political meaning. It means a sphere of autonomy, of fending for oneself, of exploring and taking up a space that makes them independent from a male.

When a woman is confronted with a problem, we women usually have a lot more *drive* in this sense . . . because we have something very powerful, and that's our children . . . And all of a sudden your nice hubby leaves and a whole lot of stuff, and you have to go to work, and I guarantee you, they go . . . and they go and they go . . . So? It turns out that the woman's delighted, she knows she's working and that she can make a living *on her own*. (Gd13: female, low-wage employee)

I need to know that I can *survive on my own* without anyone giving me money.  
(Gd13: female, low-wage employee)

### Invested, donated, appropriated and relational times

In short, time is a generally, but not always, a scarce resource whose use must be the fruit of deliberations and decisions. It is informed by a heterogeneous set of (moral, economic and political) values. It is a resource for action and, as such, may be put towards a great variety of actions. The most obvious of these actions, as their commodified determinations dictate, are strategically and instrumentally 'invested' to obtain something, that is, money, goods, self-esteem, freedom. In all these cases, the strategic and logical cost/benefit calculation prevails. We could call this modality 'time invested'. But this is not the only case where action disposes of time. There are also other modalities. I will focus on three of them: donated time, one's own time, and relational time. In all of these cases, as is the case with invested time, time is basically a scarce resource subject to deliberations and decisions, which on some occasions are instrumental and on others expressive (and most often, a mixture of the two). Some of its traits place time close to economic or moral goods or power. When something is donated to someone else, when one proceeds to appropriate time for oneself or when it is used to relate to others, time-resource reveals the same characteristics that have been highlighted so far, but in different degrees and combinations. What is the difference? It is what is done with time: in some cases it is donated, in others it is appropriated for oneself and in others it is put towards relating to others. It is the action (what is done) that punctuates time.

The first variant is 'time donated'. In this case, the time one has is donated, given as a gift or offered for reasons of affection or moral reasons. Both the emotional charge and its moralization are dense. Sometimes, time donated is shown as a pure, gratuitous plainly expressive donation of a good of extraordinary quality. In one of the agent's interventions, this was expressed as 'mother's time'.

1. 'Your son needs a *mother's time*, as I call it; I think that, in the end, he's fine with the person taking care of him, he has that mother's love, but . . . '. (Gd12: female, medium/low civil servant)
2. 'I'm talking about something else, I'm talking about spending time [with the kids], about *quality time* as people call it, if there's no time, there's no quality'. (Gd7: female, unemployed)
3. 'When she has fun, that's with her father; but when she's ill, when she wants to *eat*, when she's *tired*, when she has to *do* something . . . which is basically 80% of the time . . . [she needs her mother]'. (Gd12: female, medium/low civil servant)
4. 'I think there will never be real equality because the mindsets are completely different but men have a very significant awareness, even in bringing up children I find they pay more attention to [ . . . ], it will never be the same though, because we women have *feelings*, a completely *different* way of

being in this sense, in other words *motherhood*'. (Gd11: female, high civil servant)

Time is donated by an agent presenting itself as a highly qualified caregiver who is particularly motivated to make the donation (due to instinct, emotions, feelings). What is given is a mother's time (text 1), or quality time (text 2). The distinction made in text 3 between time donated by fathers and mothers shows the subtleness of the language games related to caring for offspring. Fathers devote time to entertaining the children while mothers devote time to what is serious and substantial (food, health, work). Gender relations are therefore obviously what determine the basic expression of donating time, that is to say, time devoted to the family and housework. And this obviously is not only because the mother donates time over-abundantly, but also because she donates it for essential tasks involving hardship.

But donated time does not always present itself in this fashion. On other occasions, it is conceived in a Mauss (1973) – or Malinowski (1922) – like gift circle where reciprocity is expected of those who receive time from their elders.

1. 'I can't imagine myself as an old woman living on my own in a home; at least have a child to come visit me once in a while . . . Women who want children aren't selfish, it's just a need so that *they don't find themselves alone in the future*'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
2. 'I think that our children, well, I have three, *I don't think they'll leave us stranded either*. Oh no! – No, no, I don't think so – Not our children; it's their partners'. (Gd7: females, unemployed)

The notion seems to be that today's donation will be returned tomorrow as care, that is, children will return the time donated. But it also does seem that the intergenerational reciprocity circuit is not fully reliable, as seen by the doubts brought to light in text/dialogue 2. The rationality of the donation (and its contorted financial rationale) remains in the time donated, but the agents do not consider it to be fully reliable, and they donate without knowing whether or not they will receive anything in return in the future.

Lastly, in other cases, the donation made is presented as a quasi-mystical sacrifice in which time donated represents a relinquishing of one's life to be donated to someone else. Verbalizations in line with this notion of donation are frequent.

1. 'Family life is understood as being with your child from the time he leaves school, and being there to teach him the way your parents taught you, and you have to make a *sacrifice* and obviously you can't have a job with any responsibility, and *the woman is the one to make the sacrifice*'. (Gd3: female, finance manager)
2. 'I see myself as selfish because I live a good life and I'm not willing to

sacrifice anything to make *sacrifices* for a child'. (Gd14: female, professional)

3. 'I took unpaid leave and *enjoyed* my baby daughter more'. (Gd5: female, nurse)
4. 'You have the whole afternoon. And you have time to be with your children, at school, to go out with them, I *haven't missed any of my daughter's childhood* and of course for me that's what's important'. (Gd11: female, high civil servant; works only until 2 pm)

Judging by these four texts, it seems clear that even in this first phase of a long circle of reciprocity, neither moral obligation nor instincts drive those who have the capability of providing materially or symbolically high-value care. Here, time donated is sacrifice in one of two different versions. The sacrifice can be pure and be made by someone immolating her time without receiving anything in exchange – a sort of destiny-driven maternal sacrifice is performed (text 1, and particularly text 2). Or, the sacrifice can be remunerated with a certain emotional gratification: enjoyment of the child, not missing the basic experience of their growing up (texts 3 and 4).

In addition to time donated, there is another type of time that functions conversely and is what one can call 'one's own time'<sup>11</sup> or 'personal' time (Gd14: male, professional) or time 'for me' (Gd11: female, high civil servant) or 'for you' (Gd11: female, civil servant) as the actors in the discussion groups term it. Time is still perceived as a resource, but is qualified because one can appropriate it for oneself and, in principle, untie it from any moral obligations or calculations of usefulness in order to focus more on self-satisfaction and living one's own independence (being oneself, showing oneself, devoting oneself to what one enjoys, and so forth). This is a recurrent theme in conversations on leisure, on passage from single to married life, on the relationships in the home between different generations, and on deciding to have children.

1. 'It's because of work, because one's so tired, and that's the reason, because of work, because it has you stressed out, and its taking away *time from your personal life* in order to make a crap living'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
2. 'For me *time for myself* is, when they were little girls I *took it away* from the meals, but now that they're a little older I usually *take it away at night, nothing is taken away for me* during their time. When they're in bed, well, either Internet or read or anything and I also go out at night, or first thing in the morning, of course, to do tai chi; but I don't take anything away from their schedule, I don't know when they're a little bit older. And well, then I also consider a *time for myself*'. (Gd11: female, high civil servant)

Although it is marked by shortage (or is experienced as empty time, in the case of the unemployed), time for oneself is generally a source of satisfaction. It

is time for hobbies, for paying attention to oneself (the mind and particularly the body). The idea that it must be stolen, heroically defended, squeezed out of barely nowhere at all, or secured by refusing the abusive demands of others, is recurrent. Time for oneself also defines a person's moral fibre, which may range from the previously discussed rationale of donation and sacrifice to its antithesis, that is, the exclusive consideration of oneself, expressively put on one occasion as 'I always attach *priority to myself*' (Gd5: female, nurse).

Another different type of time is what I call *relational time*, a variant that agents who have time (or would like to) devote to communicating with those whom Schutz (1962) called 'consociates-aging-together', that is, communication with one's partner, with friends, and so forth. Here, not only is there no moralization, but a virtual absence of explicit power relations and economic rationale. What counts, so to speak, is the sheer sociability of seeing one another, recognizing one another, feeling oneself experiencing the 'living present', to use an expression from phenomenology. And this sociability is not only preverbal and emotional, it is also communicative and seeks understanding. Because it is oriented by and towards sociability, this time-resource, acting as cement for relationships with one's contemporaries (although it is also open to successors and predecessors) obviously goes beyond plainly commodified availability, or sheer donation or appropriation of time for oneself.

1. 'The ideal worker for a businessperson right now is someone who is *alone in life* . . . someone with no parents, no boyfriend, no children, with nothing. So what happens? All that person has to do in life is work'. (Gd14: female, professional)
2. 'And on the weekdays, well, spend time with my husband, and talk, because its very important to *talk to them*, because you, when you loose *communication with them* . . . forget it . . . separation with most people has to do with communication because the two people *don't even see each other, don't even talk, or anything: hello and goodbye*'. (Gd13: female, low wage employee)
3. 'Being at home all day depresses me . . . I need to *communicate* with others, have a job and everything'. (Gd13: female, low wage employee, lower-middle class)
4. 'You don't have *time for friends* . . . I have a whole lot of friends, a whole lot of people who I'm friendly with, whose house to go to, and they come over and all . . . and I don't have time for any of that'. (Gd13: female, low wage employee, lower-middle class)

The antithesis of relational time is presented in the crude portrait of the *homo oeconomicus* in text 1: a solitary being who lives to work, who has no roots, does not belong to any group, and does not communicate with anyone. The space for couples, conceived as conversational (text 2), contrasts with this image. And even work (text 3) is conceived this way, just like, naturally, that crucial space

between friends, which shrinks over time (text 4). Therefore, relations with others, communication and time all blend together, and time as a resource is used to weave the communicative fabric of one's social life.

I will limit the variants of time analysed to these. Although these variants have yet to be completed, what has been presented so far reveals the interest for the social sciences in this world cluttered with nuances and distinctions that come hand in hand with metaphors of time as a resource for action. While this world is obviously expansive, it should also be evident that beyond the limits of the metaphoric complex, it dissolves as a plausible trope and is replaced by others, which are contextually more operative.

### **Time as an Environment**

The most recurrent metaphor to illustrate the boundaries of time as a resource presents time as an *environment*. Perhaps other more flashy expressions could be used to describe it, such as framework or scenario.<sup>12</sup> I've chosen the image of an environment because it seems to me to encompass the hard core of a metaphor that generates a host of variants while always relating back to the relationship between something circumscribed and the external environment in which it is set. As the system theory hypothesises, an environment is where action is set, what one comes up against and is eventually what a system is embedded into.<sup>13</sup> In this case, what is demarcated by time-environment is action. And therefore, in this metaphor, conversely to the previous one, time is no longer assumed to be a substance or something that one has, but rather something in the world-environment that one comes up against, and into which one eventually embeds action. Also, following along the previously discussed lines put forward by Arendt (1958), here, although time is still conceived as a function of action, the action does not present itself as agency, but instead as patience. In other words, it is not an agent (or doer) but a patient (or sufferer) that relates to time-environment. This is what makes this metaphor appear in discursive contexts explaining what demarcates, provides conditions for, determines and sweeps away action, as well as what makes it possible, what enables action to break through or be likely.

### **Static/dynamic, repetitive/explosive environmental time**

When time is presented as an external environment for action, it usually operates with two pairs of opposites that give rise to a great variety of verbalizations. On one hand, the agents speak of their world of action as located in an enveloping, fixed, grid-like time where what occurs stands. I will call that this aspect of the metaphor a 'static pole of time'. It is in this framework that expressions placing

action and the things in the world *in* time take on meaning, as if time were something one could be in or through which one passes.<sup>14</sup> On the opposite extreme is the image of a time environment which, far from receiving and being the niche for action, acts itself and moves by itself instead of remaining still and waiting. This is the 'dynamic pole of time'. In this context, the most recurrent expression is one that speaks of the passing of time hopefully, melancholically or fatally. Unlike what we might see in incorporated time, here what passes is not a person him- or herself. It is not one's own life, but rather the passing of the world (the world-time of Blumenberg, 1986), and one must coincide with, adapt to, or heroically resist it.

1. '*There comes a time* when you settle down with a steady girlfriend, you start a home and you get bogged down. You have to have a roof over your head. And so you get into a mortgage, and that gets very hard. You've got to get together the money to make the first payments and that's when you get into a second job. A normal job and then you look for money to pay the mortgage, the whatever, the furniture'. (Gd10: male, industrial worker)
2. 'Who knows what can happen years down the road, because *life takes those radical turns*'. (Gd4: female, administrative assistant)
3. '*Fate, you see that you have no control over . . . not even over what you're doing*'. (Gd6: male, unemployed)

The contrast between what is implicit in text 1 and what dramatizes the confessions in the other two texts is fully expressive of the difference between the static and dynamic poles of time. On one extreme (text 1), time unfolds as a succession of events and phases that correspond to pre-established 'seasons' that reliably normalize one's life: engagement, marriage, a home, an increase of working time, children . . . The action itself is placed in that time which one passes through while time stays still, so to speak, and continues to provide a framework, a niche or an appropriate environment. On the opposite extreme (texts 2 and 3), contrarily, time unfolds by itself, eventually changing course, sweeping human beings along with it or coming to meet them, like it or not. So in short, time-environment is not just a static ensemble, an enclave or niche, where one finds oneself; it is also a dynamic tide that is unleashed and washes away. It is both at once. It is what we pass through and what happens.<sup>15</sup>

This polar pair of opposites, static/dynamic, is complexly combined with another closer but not identical pair of opposites setting repetition against explosion. 'Repetition' refers to the routinization of the social world, and is particularly relevant when accounting for daily life. Giddens (1984) has stressed this. From this point of view, time is not merely *where* one is, but it is also an order or sequence of repetition, both reliable and demanding at the same time, from which nothing may stray and to which all action must adapt, since the dense web of calendars and schedules it translates into has its own logic that goes beyond

action. In the discussion groups, the kind apotheosis of this image of time could be found in the confessions of certain civil servants who recognized themselves as being privileged:

And it's a luxury and I think that it's better not to touch the *civil service working hours* because it gets the public very upset and what's more, it makes me ashamed. – Yeah, yeah. – So I think that in that sense, well it's true that it's an option, costs you part of your salary, but we have it, and people out there on the street don't and if their kids get ill, they just have to bear it, leave the kid with whoever, do all sorts of complicated things, much more than we do because they don't get home before 8 in the evening. (Gd11: female, high civil servant)

As opposed to the reliable repetition of working hours, this other pole underscores, to use Yuri Lotman's (1999) expression, 'explosion', that is, the breaking through of an event not encompassed in one's own expectations. This event renews the known world, for better or worse. From this standpoint, as Bergson (1930) also insisted in reference to his issue, the *durée*, time-environment is novelty or is nothing at all. The stories of the unemployed, dramatized by the event that reduced them to their current state (text 1: fatality; text 2: the breaking through of unscrupulous heirs, etc.), illustrate this explosive environment in which the unthinkable occurs.

1. 'I made the terrible mistake, the *fatal mistake* of becoming self-employed'. (Gd6: male, unemployed)
2. 'It was a closure, *a closure because of four stupid young kids*, the parents were retired, we had been working in that company for 32 years, I started when I was 14 and I had never worked anywhere else, and these kids got a hold of the company, they saw cash and said, hey, they put their caps out, the competition paid them to live like lords and they sent everyone away'. (Gd6: male, unemployed)

The metaphor of time as an environment is articulated by this dual polarity, the static/dynamic pole and the repetitive/explosive pole, which also opens the door to dilution through irony (Ramos, 2006). Underneath it all, it is responsible for that cluttered mix of order and untidiness, *cosmos* and *chaos* that the social actors account for when speaking of their world. This contradictory experience is continuously verbalized.

### Temporal environment de-structured

On one hand, time as an environment seems to entail a complexity that is impossible for the agent to tackle, thus leading to the buzzwords 'stress', 'being stressed out', and also to 'anxiety', 'confusion', and 'fatalistic despondency', and even reaches the extreme of those who feel subjected to a 'roulette' (Gd2:



male, finance manager) or those who say they are 'drowned by time' (Gd4: female, administrative assistant). Statements on this issue abound, and female workers use the most dramatic language to describe their experiences:

1. 'I have *morning and afternoon shifts* and my life is *chaos*, because of course, no one likes to be on the morning and afternoon shifts, but really it's worse for a mother because she has to organise things with the grandmothers, the schools, the neighbours'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
2. 'There comes a time when you're so stressed out, because then, aside from your work, you come home and you have the work because of the kids, the work because you're a wife, the housework, plus the work as a granddaughter, as a sister'. (Gd5: female, nurse)
3. 'I'm really sorry, but I can't *divide myself* more than I do'. (Gd5: female, nurse)
4. '*You can't*, you don't have the *schedule*; you don't have the *time*'. (Gd5: female, nurse)

These very dense, dramatic texts are just a small sample of how the 'de-structuring of time' is perceived and how women become victims of the resulting chaos (text 1). The situation is finally diagnosed as being oppressive, anxious, *stressful*, depressing (text 2), and, in fragments 3 and 4, reaches the extreme of being at the absolute limit of divisibility of time (and of oneself) and of impotence, since one can no longer divide oneself to adjust to time divided into crumbs. One cannot make any more because there is no time to.

But this chaotic time giving rise to denouncement and despondency reveals itself to be so heterogeneous and poorly articulated that it sweeps away a life based on systematic *rush*, sheer moving or running with no direction. The fragments on the theme are expressive. They range from the rationale 'now, everything now' (text 1), to that of defining work as a great race in which no one can stand still (text 3) and the future as living at a faster and faster pace (text 4), and include rushing 'back and forth' (text 2).

1. 'Wherever you go, whatever day it is, everyone rushes, and everyone wants *everything now, everything now*'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
2. '*Zip, zap rushing*, the tube, which arrives late, and that's it, you're rushing, that's it, the girls, you leave them off, it's *stress . . . we live in a rush . . . back and forth*'. (Gd13: female, low-wage employee)
3. 'If you *stop* and stop competing . . . then, what happens? Well, they start to *retire you*, and maybe your company is so good that they don't give you the sack, but they *set you aside*, they start to *abandon you*, they put you in a *corner* and you end up doing something that eventually burns you out'. (Gd14: male, professional)
4. 'To work more, make more money, *live at a faster pace*'. (Gd12: female, low/medium civil servant)

This sort of world is rather chaotic, poorly shaped, and full of uncertainty. It entails complexity, which one cannot handle or administer through action, making it particularly painful. The 'discourse of complaint' on time, which seems to be so firmly rooted in the commonplaces of the contemporary world, is omnipresent. Action is not set in an environment that disposes of and orders suitable time. Complaints over-abound, encompassing everything in apocalyptic judgements: 'nowadays everything is very bad' (Gd13: female, low-wage employee). And it is not just a question of not having the time one needs to meet the temporal demands stemming from the environment. It is that these demands are suffered from because they are unarticulated, because they lack a *rhythm*. This musical-temporal expression is crucial – as Durkheimians had intuited in their studies on ritual. The temporal rhythm is lacking either due to a surplus or a dearth, either because nothing happens and it is all the same (text 1), or because too many things happen in an unstable way (texts 2 and 3).

1. 'Everyday is the *same*'. (Gd6: male, unemployed)
2. 'The shifts mean you have no *rhythm*, you may be on in the morning or in the evening, you may be there for 4 hours or for 6 hours or on Sundays, and that breaks up the family'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
3. 'No one can keep up this *pace*'. (Gd2: male, finance manager)

### **Stratification, embedding and synchronization of environmental time**

Not everything in the framework of the time-environment metaphor is a complaint discourse or an acknowledgement of chaos or lack of rhythm in the temporal world in which one is installed. The other side to this chaos is the ordered (or orderable) *cosmos*. Time cannot be only the experience of being torn apart and of powerlessness. It must also be the crucial framework in which the agents can proceed to significantly reduce the world's unencompassable complexities. By fulfilling this, time appears as both strict and a reliable lord. It is through time that the complexity of modernity becomes administrable. What the actors find in the weave of temporal fixation is a way of ordering the world through what Lewis and Weigert (1981) called embedding, stratification and synchronization of social time. What the agents tell each other and mention when speaking of themselves is precisely how they seek and sometimes stumble upon this temporal weave that embeds their times or that of institutions. They speak of how they proceed to stratify them, and about how many strata are found in a given context and whether or not they are transitive. And in the framework of this embedding and stratification, what the agents address passionately, because a lot is at stake for them, are the various possibilities that may be structurally open or closed in order for them to synchronize and eventually make their temporal universes compatible.

Problems arise in all of these categories. Order in time is sought but not always found. There is no universal principle to *stratify* time allocated to activities, and, what's more, when it does exist, it does not always function appropriately. As verbalized, the situations are highly varied:

1. 'And your *pivot* is work, and you adapt to it . . . *We live to work*'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
2. 'Because *housework* is as *dignified* as *work outside the home*, and I think it's twice as stressful to take care of the kids, clean the house, as working outside the home'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
3. 'As long as I can pay for my whims and have money to go out and for my own stuff . . . '. (Gd9: male, young, temporary employee)
4. 'Looking for work which is your *obligation as a man*'. (Gd6: male, unemployed)
5. 'I've never stopped doing what I thought of as my *personal career* and it's something I can't do without, whether I have kids or I don't. I don't know how I would manage both, but I think if I were *at home* for 3 months *doing nothing*, I would jump out the window, and as far as kids I think well, if they're raised well, good, and if not, well, not so good'. (Gd11: female, high civil servant)

On one hand, work outside the home is the most widespread principle for articulating time, since work time is considered to be the top stratum and the other types of time are subordinated to it. It seems therefore to be an axis, a pivot or a *zeitgeber* of the social time system. Some even acknowledge it to be an (eventually oppressive) end in one's own life (text 1). But on the other hand, other structuring principles and its degradation into something simply instrumental threaten working time's value as a hierarchical principle. Working time competes as a principle for organizing the agents' time with at least two other (aesthetically and morally) superior types of time: time for oneself and one's own diversion (text 3) and time devoted to the home-family complex (text 2). Yet obviously, work acts as a social pivot not only for instrumental reasons, not only due to need or destiny, but also because to work and being a worker is a value in and of itself, or even the main value that a human can incarnate. The unemployed man seeking work because it is his duty as a 'man' asserts this (text 4), but so does the female civil servant who puts her career first and is not willing to sacrifice it for her children, home and family (text 5).

The stratification of time sweeps other issues of temporal *embedding* away with it. Activities have to find a time 'slot' in order to get done. In general terms, the issue of temporal embedding of the system of activities is conceived as one of 'reconciling', 'moulding', or 'making compatible' two basic blocks of action requiring time: work and the home-family.

1. 'Doing your working hours and *having* your family life'. (Gd2: male, finance manager)
2. 'Reconciling your family life with your work life'. (Gd3: female, finance manager)
3. 'Reconciling what your work is with the home, and especially when children come it's an *extremely complicated task*, really, I see it as extremely complicated, something you really have to make an effort at, you really need to want to'. (Gd14: female, professional)

The first two fragments clearly portray the ideal of embedding. This is what is called reconciling. But obviously, it is arduously accomplished, as underscored in text 3. And this same thread of temporal embedding gives rise to the issue of *synchronization*. What is in play here is not so much the time slots one has to do one thing or another, but rather the type or degree of temporal coordination that various agents have. Calendars and schedules, providing the conditions enabling synchronization, incarnate the maximum expression of coordination strategies.

1. 'In my case I work from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and I have a twelve-year-old child and my husband has a business, so he has a *very flexible schedule* and I *balance* very well, because I have the whole late afternoon and evening free to be at home with my child'. (Gd5: female, nurse)
2. 'The work schedules of both men and women *are not compatible* with the *children's schedule*'. (Gd13: female, low-wage employee)
3. 'I didn't like [working at night] because in fact I was *going against* everybody else [ . . . ] – "It breaks up your day" – What would you do? You would have lunch and you don't have time to see anyone . . . I don't know, you lost your mornings . . . I didn't like it, but you know. – *People have a different schedule*'. (Gd9: female, young, temporary employee)

Three situations can be gleaned from these texts. First, there is an atypical case of good synchronization between three actors with different schedules: mother-wife, father-husband, and small child. In the case of the nurse (text 1), synchronization works, thanks to the partner's complementing work. But this does not occur often. Text 2 presents a thesis often found in the discussions: that children and their parents are unsynchronized. This situation is even more serious in the cases of the so-called 'Saturday shoppers' (Gd1: female, cashier) or the night shift workers (text 3). Both live on their own temporal islands isolating them or making it very difficult to relate not only to their family groups, but also to other citizens. And this turns them, at times, into temporal pariahs.

### Time as a Horizon

In addition to a long pedigree in the history of thought, the last metaphor of time as a *horizon*, like the two before it, is deeply rooted in everyday language. For time to be a horizon means (1) that it is unattainable (since it moves as one approaches), (2) that its definition depends on where the observer is and, therefore, (3) that it is unstable, changing. These are the three known properties of spatial horizons shared by temporal horizons.

This notion was found back in Saint Augustine's triple present,<sup>16</sup> and is deeply rooted in our own language on time when we make the distinction between past, present and future. Otherwise, it seems clear that the observation point in this spatial metaphor is the present of action. We therefore assume that the ensemble of the temporal horizon contemplated depends on that present and varies according to its changing shape. And we can never reach this horizon or be in its midst, but merely observe it and give an account of what we observe.

That time is a horizon has a noteworthy repercussion on social action. It was previously stated that time as a resource is balanced with action as agency, while time as an environment does so with action as patience. In the case of time as a horizon, both agency and patience disappear and are replaced by more directly cognitive aspects of intentionality, such as observation or sheer contemplation. Intentional actors do not only act (agent or doer) and are not only acted upon (patient or sufferer), they also observe, contemplate and consider the world that they are doing and suffering from the standpoint of what was and what will be, of memory of the past and conjecture regarding the future. This is what provides the temporal horizons for social action.

A horizon is opened and defined as a function of the point of observation, but it is the horizon itself, that is, what is in its midst, that confers to the observation point its quality or value. From the cliff and only from the cliff does one see the sea, does one see that endless extension. And this is precisely what confers such a high contemplative value to the cliff. By the same principle, and as G. H. Mead (1929) underscored, all past (or future) is the past (or the future) of a present, and is transformed with it. And that contemplated past (or future) now can provide meaning (or value or plausibility) to the present in whose midst I am and from where I contemplate. Therefore, if the present action defines the time horizon (that which can be observed), it is precisely what is observed, that is, the past remembered (and what it hides or what is forgotten) or the future that is conjectured that can provide meaning to a present that, without these two handles, would collapse over itself or be a tedious top. As a result, and although in this case the connection with action is more mediate, the result obtained is of the utmost importance and can be enunciated as follows: the conversion of time into a horizon where one can observe the past and future is the condition enabling the present of action to be conferred with *meaning*. To put it more synthetically:

action can gain meaning (and the agents eventually gain some rudimentary identity) in the framework of a temporal horizon. How? Through accounts of the past and conjectures about the future.

Using this hypothesis, we move towards exploring how accounts and conjectures appear in the agents' discourses. While they obviously do appear, they do so with many variants ranging from compact to fragmented, from followable to broken, from assertive and definite to precarious and stumbling. I will provide a few indications in an attempt to make use of the very rich information on the issue.

### Narrating the past

*Narration* is a part of life itself. As the Brazilian novelist Nélide Piñón says, 'at the end of the day, we all need to have a story to tell. The man arriving home at night brings more than bread and cheese. He also brings a story to tell his loved ones' (Piñón, 2005). Actually, it would be better to define the *homo sapiens* as the *homo narrans*. The stories that are told comb through vast horizons, but also sum up and weave the plot of the day to day with immediacy once the sun goes down. As we see in the following text, family life ends up being punctuated by stories told by the parents when they come home and entertain the children. All one needs is time available, time to tell them:

When I get home they're usually in bed, but they're not usually asleep. They're there with the light on, although sometimes I do find them asleep, but they ask me: How was your day, mummy? Good. And they say to me: *tell us* something about the Hospital, and sometimes *I tell them* funny anecdotes and they *have a whale of a time*, but other times I say: I'd better not. (Gd5: female, nurse)

But the narratable universe does not remain circumscribed to the short horizon of what has just occurred. Accounts range back into the 'past'. The narrative reconfiguration of the horizon of the past is the result of the joint operation of remembering and forgetting in a present of action claiming meaning. The accounts arising are woven in various ways, pooling from an ensemble of possible stories available in one's cultural milieu.<sup>17</sup> But in any case, as Maurice Halbwachs (1950) underscored in the field of the sociology of memory, being is remembering. If this is so, then the complex made up of what is remembered and what is forgotten should not be considered bio-organic (depending on the health of our brain or our mental equilibrium), nor should it be considered basically technical (depending on available mnemotechnics). Instead it is rather basically a social reality. The older we are, and the more plausible our pretensions of 'being' are, the more these selective mechanisms of remembering and forgetting function, that enable us to generate significant accounts of the past from which our identity arises. This is illustrated by agents as temporally com-

plex as unemployed males, and by their choice to provide a significant account of their past as workers and of the set of explosive events that determined their loss of employment. This choice is clear and deeply reaching. They want to recount and insist on being heard. They generate stories, surround themselves with stories, and shield themselves with stories. But because they themselves are no longer something subjectively and socially plausible, those stories of the past are no longer available, becoming increasingly problematic as the situation takes hold, as humiliation accumulates, and as their status as workers, in other words their being 'Joe Bloggs' that are good for something, looses plausibility in the present. The following three texts are variants of these recounts of the past that must be pooled from to provide meaning to a demanding present:

1. 'It was a closure, *a closure because of four stupid young kids*, the parents were retired, we had been working in that company for 32 years, I started when I was 14 and I had never worked anywhere else, and these kids got a hold of the company, they saw cash and said, hey, they put out their caps, the competition paid them to close the company because it was in their way, and the kids are living like lords and they sent everyone away'. (Gd6: male, unemployed)
2. 'If I'm not working today it's because I wanted to *fight* and I kept wanting to *fight* and *fight*, and so the company said, look, you're not irreplaceable, and two kicks out the door, and *go home*'. (Gd6: male, unemployed)
3. 'And *they didn't give me the sack*, I went up to my boss and said, I sat down with him and said: "I've had a gutful of you", "bugger off; it's *a luxury*" – "That's *a luxury*, yes sir". (Gd6: male, unemployed).

But not all accounts of the past necessarily make reference to an explosive event unleashing one's present. The past is a bottomless pit of stories teaching lessons about the current world, either showing its degradation or its positive values. All of the agents open themselves up to recalling their past, not only their own experienced past, but also the past they have heard about at home, from their parents. What intervenes the most in these recounts is the remembering of the world of one's childhood, of one's ancestors and, for women, of one's mother and her life, her situation, her comparison with mothers today.

1. 'We've lost what it meant to *live happily*, and now we don't know what it is to really be happy, and to enjoy whatever we have; people *don't enjoy*, and they used to. Back then, *our parents* had *nothing at all*, and they were *happy*'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
2. 'And there was *family life*, and your parents were with you when you were studying, and now that's not possible, and in general well, the telly didn't absorb all that time back then, and our parents had their working hours and there was *time to be with the family*'. (Gd2: male, finance manager)

3. 'And they would make a *tortilla*, and we would go out anywhere, and that was the *happiness* of a weekend, and now it's like there's not happiness if you can't go to a *McDonald's*, to the pictures, here or there, and you stay home and say: "what a *drag*!"'. (Gd1: female, cashier)
4. 'In *that time* that was an option, you're a mother, you're a woman and *you stay at home*, and it was sort of *imposed*, and in that way in part I don't agree with it because you have the right to choose'. (Gd3: female, finance manager)
5. 'They had a whole lot of kids, and then there were a whole lot of other people they had on their shoulders that they had to take care of, of course, of their fathers, their mothers, in this case also of their mothers- and fathers-in-law, and all . . . so the whole thing was a conglomerate . . . but well, that's not true today, *today you have an old age home and you get to breathe a little bit*'. (Gd13: female, low-wage employee)

There is no lingering to fully construct these semblances from the past to include all the richness of their details. They are simple, rather stereotypical pictures contrasting the before with the now. But although the reconstruction is limited to sketches, images, or impressions, it is of enormous relevance in order to confer meaning to the present-day. What articulates all of the fragments is the implicit notion that the past is not a territory to be contemplated for the pleasure of contemplating, as if it had meaning in and of itself. If one recalls, it is to evaluate the past, and if it is evaluated it is to build a firmer judgement of the present. The underlying issue is whether or not we are better than our parents, whether our mothers experienced fuller happiness. And the variations on the theme are plentiful. In certain cases (1 and 2) there is a profound idealization of the past and it is stressed that there was a different type of life, one could simply have a nice *tortilla* in family company, there was conversation at home and one's parents (or at least one's mother) was present, at hand, accessible. In other cases (3 and 4), women's past subordinate situation is revealed and problems are found with this as a model for the present. In any case, the past is a very rich well from which one can draw meaning, and because one can only reconstruct by recounting, the stories cannot be anything other than moral. The memory remembering the past is a moral conscience judging the present.

### Shrinking and stretching the future

While the past is a horizon contemplated in the present-day, it is also true that the past must be told to confer meaning to the present-day. The problem is that it is not always available. Sometimes the past gets trapped in the fog of more or less, of what is forgotten, or of insignificance. Its lack or thinning of substance can only be offset by a broadening of the *future* horizon, that is, by pooling from



that set of plausible 'images' or 'conjectures' enabling the present to be significantly moulded according to the possibilities open to the future. This basic issue in the social construction of the metaphor of time as a horizon can be tackled particularly when examining the temporal universe of young adults, their recounts of the past (very much thinned out and poor in exemplary value) and, above all, in their conjectures about the future. Obviously, many variants, and even incompatible worlds arise here.

On one hand, we can see the *shrinking* of the temporal horizon to the extreme that it becomes an anchor in the present, closed around itself, with no windows, no 'view'. It is highly characteristic of young adults with precarious work, entering and exiting the job market, for whom the notion of a future horizon has no immediate relevance since they believe that the future will come by itself and it is better not to take it into consideration now.

1. 'Me, for the time being *I live the day-to-day, the present*. For me the *future* . . . Yeah, I see it out there more or less with foresight, but I *don't think about it much either*'. (Gd9: female, young, temporary employee)
2. 'When tomorrow comes I'll have to grin and bear it, but for the time being I can live [ . . . ] – Of course, *for the time being you think of the present* [ . . . ] – When tomorrow comes I'll probably have to *bear down*'. (Gd9: female and male, young, temporary employees).
3. 'The work I'm doing now is because, okay, because you're young and all, but then when you're 30–32 years old you have to look for something steady, and there's nothing that motivates me, that I like. Not for now . . . That's why I'm a little *afraid* of it [the future], but anyway. – Me too, I'm also afraid of it. Because right now you're 24 years old and if you have to . . . they'll give you work anywhere: as a hostess, or whatever, or in a clothes shop . . . as a secretary . . . You can choose any job, but then *when you're older*, you say: "I have to get skilled . . . "''. (Gd9: females, young, temporary employees)
4. 'I reckon my parents did the same thing when they were young; they earned whatever, and they lived for themselves and spent it, and they had a good time and that's it. Then when they have kids they start to save, they think of the kids and of "this has to be paid" of . . . They start *to think a little more about the future*. But I think when they were young and all, they didn't . . . at least you don't think about it much'. (Gd9: male, young, temporary employee)

The temporal horizon before us is small and uniquely dense and compact. It acts as a magnet preventing the unfolding of past and future. Everything tends to get locked up in a territory that is placed in an uncertain space between a Peter-Pan-like dream of eternal adolescence and the realism of adaptation to a situation of structural minorization (one lives at home with one's parents; one only has temporary jobs). This is one variant, but there are others. Young profession-

als living the agonizing justification (sometimes disbelief) of a limited and purely sacrificial present (with the exception of sporadic weekend satisfactions), also exemplify this. They find meaning in what present themselves as highly reliable institutional conjectures of future triumph and fully compensatory satisfaction. Instead of the shrinking or cancelling of the future, here we see the *stretching* of the future.

1. 'They tell you you're going to move up, they always *play with the future* [ . . . ] – It's not something you can pay for with money. When you stay late in the evening it's for recognition, so that your *projection* in your career goes faster. – Or put to you that you have *objectives* you have to fulfil if you want that job'. (Gd2: males, finance managers)
2. 'I could stop working and my partner could pay the mortgage, but for me, my personal decision is to have a *career* because *down the road* I may not have a partner, or because *I studied a profession* so that I could work, or for a lot of other reasons'. (Gd3: female, finance manager)

In all of these interventions, language on work is futurized, as illustrated by the expressions used: the spiral sucking one further and further in, the career, the objectives set by one's institution or oneself, the day tomorrow comes, the decision about the future one made when choosing one's course of study, and so forth. Unlike the previous case, these conjectures do not reveal a unique and isolated present, but rather a sacrificial present with immolation of a today-time that will be duly remunerated in the future. The future is certainly a foreign land, but appears as if it were transported closer in a journey with increasingly reliable guides.

In any event, just as variety dominated the accounts of the past, the contrast between what the different types of young adults say (and tell themselves) shows just how varied the horizons for the future are. Temporal social horizons are heterogeneous.

## Conclusions

Time is part of the everyday language with which social actors assign meaning to what they do and what happens to them. And it is not just something that is out there implicitly or hidden. It is something that manifests itself explicitly, on the very surface of language. What happens and what is done are temporized. To speak of one's experience is to speak of time.

This also occurs when what is addressed in conversations between the social actors is the relationship between work and everyday life. Before they take on any specific meaning, before they are described and valued, work and everyday life are conceived within the framework of time, that is, as working time and

everyday life time (i.e. for the family, children, friends, fun, housework and so forth). And it is through the framework of their temporization, of their meaning as something that is both time and is in time, that they are verbalized. Attention must be paid to the temporal aspects of everyday actions and events in order for them to be analysed. This is why attention was focused on these languages of time as a preliminary step to analysing what happens in time or what time is. My view of time sociology is therefore one that goes beyond addressing secondary, subordinate or anecdotal aspects of what the actors do or what happens to them. In my view, these aspects open up the possibility of accessing the study of phenomena in the social sphere. First, the time that the social actors speak of must be defined in order to then go on to address what they say about the world, work, the family, their children, their diversions, and so forth.

From analysing the language games that unfold in the discussion groups, my conclusion is that time is conceived in at least three ways, expressed through three decisive metaphors: 'resource', 'environment', and 'horizon'.

First, time is held as a resource that one has or accesses in order to act. This approach to time reifies it, following close in the footsteps of the metaphor presenting time as a commodity, or in an even more limited view, as money. Yet it would be misleading to conclude that time is merely something of economic value that is rationally used or invested in doing one thing or another. While time as a resource may on occasions be considered economic, on other occasions it may be moral, political, ludic, or expressive. As a moral resource it is valued according to the good/bad, owed/prohibited code. As a political resource it is used in order to ensure independence of decisions. As a ludic resource, it may be 'lost' or 'won' in free, communicative interactions with others. As an expressive resource, it may be made available so that one can express oneself, show oneself or be oneself. Time as a resource may thus incorporate many values and it would therefore be abusive to identify it with economic values and conceive time merely as a commodity.

Second, time is an external *environment* that action encounters and which must be adapted to. In this metaphor, time cannot be appropriated, but is rather an external medium that enables, conditions, constricts, closes, and so forth. The language games in which this metaphor is expressed show the complexity of this environment metaphor. I have shown that time-environment is structured based on two different polarities, one setting static against dynamic, and the other setting repetition against explosion. Yet beyond the pivoting between these polarities, time as an environment dominates one's experience of the world because it can be presented, in certain cases, as disarray or even chaos, triggering suffering, anxiety or stress, and in other cases as a reliable order into which actions may be temporally embedded, hierarchized and synchronized.

Lastly, time is also a *horizon*. It is not something out there that can be appropriated or adapted to, but something situated as a double horizon in the cognitive

scenarios of intentionality. The horizon may face a past, leading to narratives retrieving memories from oblivion. While these narratives are fundamental, they are not always available. But the horizon may also face a set of images or conjectures projected beyond the present towards the uncertain region of the future. Whichever direction it faces, this double horizon enables meaning to be assigned to what happens, and enables actors to eventually attain plausible identities.

All of this enables us to draw a final conclusion arising from our analyses. Confirming our initial assumption, metaphors of time are not only relevant in terms of their poetics, but are equally relevant on a pragmatic level. As time is depicted, action is conceived. More specifically, the different metaphors of time depict the relationship between time and action in different ways. When time is conceived as a resource, the actor is an agent (or doer) deliberating or adopting decisions for which he or she is accountable. Conversely, when time is conceived as an environment, the actor is a patient (or sufferer) exposed to outcomes that basically do not depend on what he or she does. Lastly, when time is conceived as a horizon, it is something observed or contemplated, and only becomes action as a function of the image of the world or identity it affords.

## Notes

This article was produced in the international research framework *Tiempo de trabajo negociado y temporalidades sociales vividas en el marco de las transformaciones en curso de la norma temporal del empleo: convergencias y conflictos* [Working Time and Experienced Social Temporalities in the Frame of the Current Transformations within the Temporary Employment Norm: Convergences and Conflicts.] (Madrid, 2002–6), funded by CICYT (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, Spain) (ref. SEC2001–1480) and by the European Science Foundation (ref. SEC2002–10230-E). An earlier version was presented at the international colloquium *Tiempos, Actividades, Sujetos*. Escuela de Relaciones Laborales [Times, Activities, Agents. Industrial Relations School] (UCM), Madrid, February 2005. I would like to thank the other members of the Spanish team: Carlos Prieto (UCM), Javier Callejo (UNED), Ricardo Morón (UAM), Pablo Meseguer (UCM) and Jorge Lago (UCM); members of the French team, Paul Bouffartigue (UAP-LEST) and Jacques Bouteiller (UAP-LEST); and members of the Belgian team, Esteban Martínez (ULB-IT). Juanma Irazo's (UPN) sharp and extensive comments were crucial in improving the text. My last, but not least heartfelt thanks go to *Time & Society's* anonymous reader for insightful commentaries and suggestions. I also wish to express my thanks to Ms Beth Gelb for her accurate translation of my article from Spanish into English.

1. In addition to the reference works I will be mentioning over the course of this exposé, the most expressive proof of the new time sociology and its thematic horizons and analytical breadth is the publication, since 1992, of the journal *Time & Society*.
2. Or by thinkers addressing the issue tangentially, such as Lash and Urry (1994), Harvey (1990), Jameson (1991), Castells (1996), Bauman (2000), and so forth. In

- Ramos (1997) I make reference to the theories on time in the works of Luhmann, Giddens and Adam.
3. Discussion groups are research techniques akin but not identical to focus groups. Although the differences involve degree and emphasis and must be specified on a case-by-case basis, the greatest difference lies in the fact that discussion groups use less directive and more flexible, open manners than focus groups. In consequence, discussion groups search for an autonomous interaction between the participants, but by no means do they search for a question/answer relationship between the researcher and people under research. Unlike focus groups, in discussion groups, the researcher confines him- or herself to introducing what is going to be discussed and to moderating the discussion among group members. The aim is for the group to be able to communicate and eventually reach an agreement through the thread of discussion arising and asserting itself independently. For further reading on discussion groups, see Callejo (2001); on the relations between discussion groups and focus groups, see Padilla (1993).
  4. The discussion groups (Gd) were carried out in the framework of the research work *Tiempo de trabajo negociado y temporalidades sociales vividas en el marco de las transformaciones en curso de la norma temporal del empleo: convergencias y conflictos* [Working Time and Experienced Social Temporalities in the Frame of the Current Transformations within the Temporary Employment Norm: Convergences and Conflicts.] (Madrid, 2002–6). Fourteen homogeneous discussion groups were constituted according to the specificities of their members' working time and family situation. The sessions were held in Madrid (Spain), 12 from December 2002 to November 2003, and two additional groups in spring 2005. Each homogeneous group met in a two-hour session with one of the members of the research group, who confined himself to putting forward the issue for discussion and moderating and directing the debate. The sessions were tape-recorded and then transcribed. The forthcoming analysis is based on the transcriptions. The following is the breakdown of the groups composition: Gd1 (cashiers, 6 females, 28–35 years old, half of whom have children); Gd2a (managers in finance, 7 males, 25–35 years old); Gd2b (managers in finance, 5 males, 25–35 years old); Gd3 (managers in finance, 9 females, 28–35 years old, half parents); Gd4 (administrative assistants, 8 females, 35–50 years old, public and private sector, half parents); Gd5 (nurses, 7 females, half parents); Gd6 (long-term unemployed, 7 males, roughly 45 years old, half parents); Gd7 (long-term unemployed, 9 females, roughly 40 years old, half parents); Gd8 (housewives, 9 females, lower-middle class, 30–40 years old, with previous work experience); Gd9 (young temporary employees, 4 females and 3 males, middle and lower-middle class, 20–25 years old); Gd10 (industrial workers, 8 males, 35–50 years old, fathers); Gd11 (high civil servants, 8 females, 30–45 years old, half parents); Gd12 (medium and low civil servants, 8 females, 25–35 years old, half parents); Gd13 (low wage employees, 8 females, lower-middle class, 35–45 years old, half mothers with no help at home); Gd14 (professionals, 6 males and 1 females, 30–40 years old).
  5. On the relevance of metaphors in philosophy, see the classical work of Blumenberg (1997).
  6. In another article, I have made a preliminary approach to three ambivalences of time triggering their specific ironies; see Ramos (2006). On the role of irony in the social science analysis, see the fundamental work by Richard Brown (1989).

7. This distinction is introduced in Arendt's analysis of practical action. She states: 'Because the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a "doer" but always at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an actor starts is composed of its consequences, deeds and sufferings' (Arendt, 1958: 190). In my terminology, Arendt's 'doer' and 'sufferer' are respectively the agent and the patient of human action.
8. On the conversion of time as a limited resource into time as money or a valuable good, see Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 44–5). The relationship between time and work as resources is analysed in Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 104–8).
9. See Adam (1999) or the more historical studies by Thompson (1967) and Postone (1993).
10. In the Discussion Group with the unemployed, one of them described the situation by prolonging the image of Mondays in the Sun: 'But *Mondays in the sun*, I think Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursday are all in the sun'. (Gd6: male, unemployed)
11. The expression of one's own time appears in works by Nowotny (1992), but with a meaning that encompasses the one established here.
12. In Ramos (2006), I use the expression 'scenario' to refer to this metaphoric variant of time.
13. See Luhmann (1987) or Luhmann and De Giorgi (1992).
14. See Adam (1990: 66–8) on the difference between 'event-in-time' and 'time-in-event', which is behind the notion of 'time-in-which' events occur.
15. This metaphoric dual experience of time in which time comes upon us (the future approaches, the past fades away) while at the same time it is something we pass through has been illustrated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 79–84) as an ostensible incongruity of everyday language regarding time.
16. For a close reading of Saint Augustine's theory of time, see Ricoeur (1983–5).
17. On the relevance of plots in narration (fiction or non-fiction) see White (1973) and Ricoeur (1983–5).

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